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ABSTRACT

A prescriptive teaching program developed by the teachers of Madison Elementary School, Fargo, North Dakota, is described in the brochure. The students are from low income families; the majority of the teachers have received their training at the New School of Behavioral Studies, University of North Dakota. In determining what is best for each child the staff has four goals: 1) to develop a positive self-concept; 2) to develop enthusiasm for learning; 3) to develop a self-reliant, self-motivated, independent pupil; and 4) to develop personal responsibility. Teachers assess each student's learning skills and learning styles, and then use this evaluation to design a program for the child. The curriculum consists of teacher developed learning packages. The teacher chooses the package which best fits the student's needs. This basic instruction is supplemented by activity-oriented learning centers: the students choose activities and keep their own record of the work they do in the centers. The student's work is evaluated and new directions in his program are decided upon in a weekly conference between each student and his teacher. Because of the importance of the teacher role in the Madison program, continual teacher training is provided. With the new learning climate, attendance has improved, and many more Madison students are going on to complete junior high and high school. (Author/RM)

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profiles of promise 23

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PROFILES OF PROMISE are descriptive brochures that highlight innovative social studies and social education practices, which teachers and administrators can easily adapt to their own classrooms or schools.

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CARING IS BASIC

at James Madison School

"There's nothing 'good' to do around here," is a statement rarely heard in Madison Elementary School, Fargo, North Dakota. On any one day a student might go to the Creativity Center and find a writing idea in the Magic Pencil. Or perhaps he would rather help prepare the daily classroom news broadcast in the Social Studies center. Or this might be his day to be the stock broker in the classroom shopping center. Maybe it would be a good time to retreat to one of the platform tree houses for some quiet study.

These are just a few of the many activities open to students who attend Madison Elementary. While activities are an important part of the program, there is much more to the Madison School Plan than creative activities. In the past five years the school staff has been working to develop a learning climate which will not only help students learn but will also help them like to learn.

Madison is a grade 1 through 6 elementary school located in northwestern Fargo. The children who attend the school are from low income families; their tested I.Q.s are significantly lower than students in other Fargo schools. The building itself was constructed in 1957 as a typical self-contained classroom building but has since been remodeled to open up areas for team teaching. Madison receives no special funding.

The majority of the teachers in Madison School have Master's degrees and most of them received their training at the New School of Behavioral Studies, University of North Dakota. The staff of the school is headed by Dr. Vincent Dodge, who received his doctorate from the University of North Dakota. This common background in training has been important in program development. There are three teacher teams: Grades 1 and 2 have four teachers and 90 children; Grades 3 and 4 have three teachers and 75 children; Grades 5 and 6 have three teachers and 80 children. Madison is moving toward a completely non-graded system, and grade designations are primarily for administrative purposes.

The Madison approach to student learning centers on the question, "Is this the very best thing for this child?" This approach is distinguished from the more teacher-centered question, "Is this the very best thing for these children?" In determining what is best for each child the Madison staff has four goals:

1. To develop a positive self-concept
2. To develop enthusiasm for learning
3. To develop a self-reliant, self-motivated, independent pupil
4. To develop personal responsibility, particularly related to the functioning of the group as well as to the child's own actions

To accomplish these goals, Madison teachers have sought to meet traditional educational requirements in untraditional ways. A description of their program can be found in a staff-produced booklet entitled *Caring is Basic.*

DIAGNOSIS

The Madison staff believes the purpose of any diagnosis is to help a child learn better. Therefore, the diagnostic process at Madison focuses not on "what a child knows" but on "how he learns"--his learning skills and his learning style.

The assessment of learning skills is divided into six areas. Teachers look for specific behaviors in judging the child's ability in each area.

1. Attention Skills
   Is the child easily distracted, hyperactive, have a low tolerance for distress?
2. Motor Skills
   Is the child clumsy? Does he have poor manual dexterity, write poorly, have poor sitting posture?
3. Visual-Receptive Skills
   Does the child lose his place while reading, make reversal errors, read in a word-by-word manner, fatigue easily when doing close work?
4. Auditory-Receptive Skills
   Is the child "too attentive" when oral instructions are given? Does he confuse similar phonic sounds, frequently ask for repetition, prefer to work at tasks which require little listening?
5. Conceptual Skills
   Does he have difficulty with time concepts, categorization, classification, concepts relating to emotions, similarities and differences?

6. Automatic Skills

Does the child have difficulty following oral instructions? Is his word order jumbled? Does he get directions confused, have poor rote memory, have poor rhythm and flow in speech?

From this assessment a teacher learns if a child has basic physiological or psychological impairments that will have to be considered in developing that child's program.

To assess a child's learning style, the Madison School personnel use a diagnostic teaching outline developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg in his book, *Diagnostic Teaching*. In this outline, Dr. Rosenberg describes four learning styles and characteristics of students exhibiting each style.

1. Rigid-Inhibited Style
   Generally unresponsive, becomes confused easily, needs constant help; is upset by changes in routine; rigidly adheres to rules
2. Undisciplined Style
   Negativistic, defiant, antisocial, disrespectful, destructive; has poor tolerance, breaks rules
3. Acceptance-Anxious Style
   Tries too hard, shows off; is overly sensitive, a worrier, fearful of failure, excessively competitive
4. Creative Style
   Thinks creatively, is persistent in problem solving, shows initiative; flexible, respectful, open to new ideas, applies knowledge

Along with Dr. Rosenberg's outline teachers also assess 14 other personality and behavior factors which have a bearing on how the child learns. (See the Diagnostic Teaching Summary Sheet in the box below.)

PRESCRIPTION

Once a diagnosis of the child's learning is made, the teacher uses this evaluation to help the student improve his learning. The teacher does most of the prescribing for each child, but the school does have a full-time diagnostician who helps teachers plan programs or find materials for selected students. Although the teacher designs a program for each child, this does not mean that each child has a completely separate program. If groups of children have like needs they have like programs. If a child's needs are unique, then he becomes a group of one.

A child's program includes two types of goals. First there are general goals which will help the child become a better learner. For example, if Johnny is diagnosed as an undisciplined learner, his teacher might decide that to help him develop the internal controls he lacks he needs to have immediate feedback on the social consequences of his behavior. So if Johnny does not finish an assignment, he might be required to stay after school that day to complete his work. If he disturbs other students, he may be socially isolated immediately. In all cases the teacher tries to provide logical and immediate consequences for Johnny's behavior.

Johnny's program also includes specific behavioral objectives. If Johnny cannot subtract, the teacher provides materials which deal with this basic skill. If Johnny is a more adept auditory than visual learner, she may provide him with tapes for the recorder so that he can listen as he reads certain materials. Whatever Johnny's needs are diagnosed to be, the teacher tries to provide specific remedies.

Students are diagnosed at the beginning of each year by their teacher, who uses the Diagnostic Teaching Summary. However, diagnosis is also a continual process at Madison. A student is not put into one category forever. As a teacher observes changes in a child's behavior, she reassesses that child's needs and makes necessary program adjustments.

CURRICULUM

One objection to an open-classroom, activity-oriented school is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate what the students are learning. Madison Elementary avoids this problem by following a specifically planned curriculum. In fact they follow the same curricular pattern as the other elementary schools in Fargo, using the same books and learning packages.

The learning packages used in the Fargo school system were developed by a group of 140 teachers working in a specially funded summer institute. The packages are groups of behavioral objectives that were written by the teachers for each subject area. They based the objectives on the textbook materials being used and drew up pre- and post-tests as part of each package. The learning packages cover each level of the elementary curriculum.

Although the learning packages are used as the basis for the curriculum, the way in which the packages are used at Madison is different from their use in more traditional schools. Rather than use a single-level package with the entire class, a Madison teacher chooses the package which best suits each student in her class. In any one class, students might be using as many as 20 different packages at one time.

Teachers at Madison work diligently to individualize the curriculum. Even in highly teacher-taught subjects like phonetics and mathematics, teachers fit the material to the child, not the child to the material. Language arts and math are the primary areas of individualization; social studies and science are started from a class position but are individualized later by involving students in special projects.

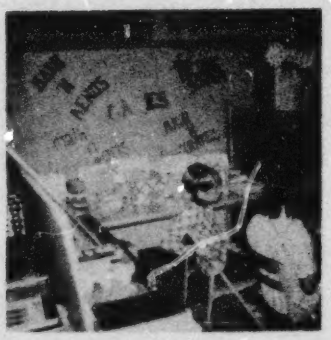
Learning centers replace rows of desks in Madison classrooms

Audiovisual Center

Reading Center

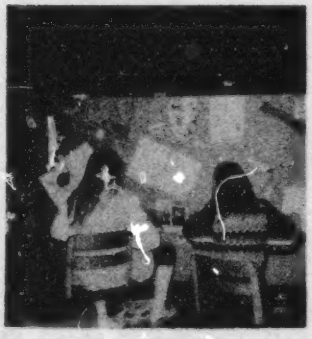
Puzzle and Problem Center

Creative Writing Center



Math Center

Shopping Center



Individual Project Center

Madison is not unstructured. The curriculum learning goals provide a framework; within this framework students can make choices about the tasks they do. Dr. Dodge believes that within this structure of "choice within limits" students are meeting academic goals while enjoying learning and building self-esteem.

CLASSROOM LEARNING CENTERS

Madison classrooms do not look like traditional school rooms. In most cases desks are gone and the room is divided into areas by panels of vividly painted, heavy tri-wall cardboard. The areas are called learning centers, and they are designed to accommodate a limited number of students at one time. Most centers contain a table and one or two chairs, but children also sit on the floor to do their work.

The learning centers are not used for basic instruction; such instruction is given either to the whole class or in small groups. Learning centers are used for motivation, broadening of practical interest, enrichment, and a tie between home and school. There are learning centers for math, social studies, creative writing, reading, art, and science, as well as puzzle centers, sport centers, listening centers, and special project centers.

Each learning center contains many activities in which students can engage. The pupils keep their own record of the work they do in the centers, on booklets or sheets that are provided. If written work is done, it is placed in a cubby hole within the center so that the teacher can peruse the work later. The answers to problems and puzzles are frequently supplied to the students, since the purpose of the centers is not to test but to motivate.

To prevent students from congregating in one or two centers, teachers generally use a sign-up sheet which indicates the maximum number of students allowed in a center at one time. Students sign up on a first-come-first-served rotating basis. Generally not more than three or four students are allowed in a center at one time.

If a visitor were to enter a fifth grade class in Madison Elementary, he might see a scene something like this. In the Creative Writing Center, named "Write On," there is a Magic Pencil suspended from the ceiling, with ideas for creative writing enclosed. A bulletin board covered with unfinished sentences taken from advertising slogans invites students to become advertising writers. A box with peep holes contains titles for stories; another box is filled with unfinished Haiku poems to complete; a third box is a "think box" for cartoon ideas.

The Math and Social Studies Center contains a mini-shopping center, Best Acres, built and run by students. Within the Center are booths for shopping and banking. Students sell homemade items like cookies and candy and school supplies; they also run a cleaning service and a booth in which students can buy stock in the center. Before the shopping center was constructed, the students went to a local bank, borrowed money for the initial investment, and signed a note with their teacher. By the end of the year they had made enough money to pay back the loan and split some profits.

Catalogue and Menu Math is a center designed to reinforce basic mathematical skills. Restaurants in Fargo contribute menus which students use in solving problems found in a card file. A sample problem might tell a student that he and three friends will eat dinner at a particular restaurant and have a certain amount of money to spend. He must decide what each one will eat, and how much the bill will be. There are also major commercial catalogues for solving other problems. One bulletin board, called "A Trip Across the United States," is used by students to compute mileage, food, room, and gas costs. A number of cribbage boards made by the manual training class are put to good use.

The Social Studies Center focuses on the United States. A huge map of the country is in the middle of the floor. The students meet around this map the first thing each morning, with their copies of the Fargo daily newspaper. News and weather items are discussed, using the map as reference. Later the "TV Station," staffed by students, does a 9:00 A.M. news and weather report which is either taped or presented over a microphone to the other students. Each state that is currently being studied has a box with activities listed on pieces of paper so students can work independently in the Center.

Animals are the current topic of the Science Center. An old washing machine serves as an aquarium for studying fish. Students have made a film about animals by drawing pictures on a large roll of paper. They show the film by rolling the paper on broom handles through an old wooden T.V. frame. A tape recording provides the audio.

The Listening Center is equipped with a record player and tape recorder. A "menu" lists the week's offerings, some musical and some narrative; students listen and evaluate what they hear. "Mission Impossible" is the name for the Puzzle Center, where students find all sorts of puzzles and games designed to reinforce basic reading and math skills. A Special Project Center encourages a tie between home and school. In this center students may work on projects which they bring from home, such as motors, clocks, knitting, or weaving.

Throughout the rest of the school there are other facilities for motivating the children. There are platform "tree houses" for quiet study. For the creative urge there are puppet stages and trunks of costumes for plays. Painted cardboard boxes hold tools and art supplies. A special Loud-Soft Room can be used for study or music. In one area students can learn how to keep bees.

Learning center activities require many materials, but at Madison costs are kept to a minimum by students and teachers making the things they use. Not

only do they make games and puzzles, they also make tables, chairs, storage bins, carrels, and magazine racks from heavy cardboard. Dr. Dodge points out, "We do not make these things because the Board of Education will not supply them, but because we think these children need to realize that everything does not need to be handed to them. They can make satisfactory things for themselves."

EVALUATION

Students at Madison are not given grades: however, they are formally evaluated. One of the hallmarks of the Madison plan is a weekly conference between each student and his teacher. These conferences are one way in which student and teacher evaluate the student's work and decide on new directions in his program. But the conferences are not confined to academic discussion. Sometimes personal problems are discussed. Teachers find these conferences a way of individualizing and of letting each student know that he is important and deserves to be heard.

To keep parents informed of their child's progress, Madison teachers hold two parent-teacher conferences each year and send home two check-list type report cards. The check lists are based on behavioral objectives. Most parents receive considerably more communication with teachers throughout the year, because the Madison staff feels parent cooperation is essential to the program. Many parents do volunteer work in the school. Parents are taken on tours of the entire school so they can understand the principles of the program rather than just view their child's classroom. By opening these channels of communication the staff can more easily discuss with parents their child's needs and program.

TEACHER'S ROLE

In summarizing the Madison School plan, Dr. Dodge has written:

> The most important single aspect is the *teacher* (training, readiness, and eagerness) in making a decision to move in this direction. The teaching personnel needs to have complete dedication and trust along with a supportive Principal, Superintendent, and Board of Education in order to achieve their goals. The personnel needs special training and creative capabilities in the use of various unique techniques, but, most of all, the teacher needs empathy, understanding, and love for each pupil.

The need for teacher excellence in the Madison plan is obvious, but it has not just happened. To help each teacher meet the school's goals, Madison provides continual teacher training. Teachers are encouraged to visit each other's classrooms to observe effective techniques. They are also encouraged to share their good ideas for approaches and materials with others on the staff. To evaluate her own performance, each teacher views a videotape of herself in the classroom and tries to determine how she can improve her non-verbal as well as verbal techniques.

Finally, the staff is expected to be supportive of each other. One of the teacher goals states, "Everyone gets tired and discouraged and needs the constant assurance that everyone else is interested and helpful."

Madison Elementary is not a rich school. Madison students are not intellectually gifted. Five years ago, before the Madison Plan was implemented, the school had a poor attendance record and a high drop-out rate. In fact, in 1970 only six former Madison students graduated from high school. With the new learning climate developed at Madison, attendance has improved and many more Madison students are completing junior high and high school. Perhaps the key to the program's success lies in a statement made by Dr. Dodge: "At Madison we would stand on our heads to get a kid to learn." Fortunately, with so many other things going for Madison students, headstands don't seem to be necessary.

DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING SUMMARY SHEET

Learning Style (check classification)	Other Factors (check +, -, or if neutral, leave blank)
Rigid-Inhibited	Personality
Undisciplined	Leadership
Acceptance-Anxious	Empathy
Creative	Ability to get along with others
Learning Skill (check areas or needs)	Self-control
Attention	Self-reliance
Motor	Creativity
Visual	Respect for authority
Auditory	Industriousness
Conceptual	Not inhibited
Automatic	Responsibility
	Happy
	Initiative
	Enthusiasm

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ERIC DOCUMENTS:

Editor's Note: The ERIC system contains many documents on learning, learning styles, and diagnostic teaching. The following are only a sample of those documents. The interested reader should conduct his own ERIC search for a more detailed listing.

ED 077 564 - THE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE YOUNG AUTONOMOUS LEARNER. 80 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. A learning center was designed to study how children seek and use available information to learn autonomously.

ED 075 275 - LEARNING STYLES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES. 25 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. This document describes the variety of teaching strategies teachers use to create individual educational environments, thus meeting a variety of student needs. A model for matching these teaching strategies to students in terms of their learning styles is described.

ED 074 673 - PRESCRIPTIVE PROFILE PROCEDURE FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES. 134 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$6.87. The Prescriptive Profile Procedure (PPP) attempts to provide teachers of learning disabled elementary school children with a procedure of individualized diagnosis and educational prescription. The instrument encompasses strengths and weaknesses in prerequisite skills, basic school subjects, and behavioral factors.

ED 073 606 - PRESCRIPTIVE EDUCATION: TEACHING AND IMPLEMENTATION. 23 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$1.29. This booklet presents a rationale for a prescriptive teaching approach and discusses materials appropriate to both the diagnostic and instructional phases of prescriptive teaching.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, WRITE:

Dr. Vincent J. Dodge, Principal
James Madison School
Fargo, North Dakota 58102

READ:

Marshall B. Rosenberg, DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING. Seattle, Wash.: Special Child Publications, Inc., 1968.